

THE VILLAGE SOCIAL SETTING AND RURAL MISSION PROGRAMS

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The cardinal fact of which those who plan programs for missions must now be aware, in my judgment, is the speed with which social changes in the organization and operation of village life in the Middle East and the Orient are proceeding. Everywhere Asiatics are in ferment. In some situations there are explosions. And the explosions are not generated out of urban conditions. The most serious ones are generated by rural circumstances. Almost suddenly, in rural cultures where a thousand years were but as yesterday and social variation has been infinitesimal over centuries, changes are now coming with unpredictable rapidity. The things we did not see is that there has been accumulating at an accelerating rate a series of activities and of ideas that have created a cultural threshold from which change proceeds with unparalleled speed. No group will be able to guide the Asiatic world that does not see that its upheavals stem from the rural people and that the time for influencing them is short.

A second related fact is that this rural ferment is almost universal throughout the East. It is not only China's peasantry that is on the march; there are the Burmese, and the Siamese, and the Philipinos, and the South Sea Islanders, with clear evidence of undersurface activity among the Indians and the Middle Easterners. A year ago in January I was a participant in a conference in the office of the Economic Advisor for the Rehabilitation of the Punjab. During the course of our discussion, a conservative Hindu, Pundit Malviya, the son of Madan Malviya, founder of Benares Hindu University, who had stopped the government from utilizing the Ganges for the production of hydro-electric power at one of its points, said, "The peasants of India are now impatient. They are in a hurry. They are insisting on a better level of living. What shall we do? Follow the slow-moving methods of democracy or adopt the swift-moving autocratic control of the communists?" Throughout Syria and Lebanon a discontent with land-use practices is accumulating among the fellahen that certainly means social tensions; in fact, I saw in the Hama area of Syria a strike of the peasants against their landlords for better living conditions. To state the matter simply, rural people everywhere now see at least in part, what they want and in most places are beginning to make a bid for it. Missions must realize this and accept the opportunity.

What are the accumulating activities and ideas that have created this situation where social change is coming with unparalleled speed among these rural people?

Foundational as they are, I shall do no more than mention the changes in communication and transportation that put what once were isolated rural communities in touch with the larger universe. I will also only mention the influences of ideas from natives returned home from contacts with

modes of life in other parts of the world and of college students, impatient and sometimes impractical in their eagerness to see reform.

For to me, there are two other forces which have penetrated the rural Orient from the West that are largely accountable for the ferment in these lands. Of course, social change is always the product of a series of interacting forces. But some stand out and in particular situations have more significance than others.

The first of these I shall illustrate from a situation in China. I was in a rural community some miles inland from Wusih with Dean C. W. Chang of Nanking Agricultural College a year ago now. Generally the area was a rice region, but here and there a few mulberry trees were scattered. The farmers were expressing their discontent with agricultural conditions and referring to days past when the village community had a strong self-sufficing economy. Now rice for the market dominates their production. I made inquiry and found that some years back the area was, in addition a rice producing region, a silk producing area. This gave not only good returns from feeding silk worms, but also supported a prosperous handicraft program. What had changed the situation? I asked one of the farmers. His response: "Man-made silk (rayon, to you) from the mills of America and England." Then he pointed in the direction of Wusih and said, "And now the mills have come to us."

For centuries a village organization that knit the peasants of the Orient together in their local communities through a self-sufficing farm-production program supported by local handicrafts existed. Theirs was a stable cooperative economy that knit the village community together in a closely unified interdependent social organization founded on family, clan, land, and religion. It gave the individual a basic security, a vital feeling of belonging, and a sense of social responsibility, while at the same time submerging him in the group. Today a commercial agricultural system which produces crops and other raw materials for the national and international market organized around a money economy, has penetrated these areas. The villages are still there. The villagers are there, at least the older and the very young ones. But village unity is gone or crumbling. In many instances the youth are gone, or remain as discontented unemployed. In large areas their land is gone, and the villager is a tenant or laborer in an absentee land-owning system. Perhaps as significant as anything else is the vast increase in the number of socially detached people, migrants, guests in the village, as the Chinese call them, who are trying to establish their roots some place in this new situation.

Lest somebody think that I am decrying social change and what many may consider progress, let me hasten to say that I am well aware that when cultures interpenetrate, what seem to be and what eventually may be greater values will be accepted. But in the process of reintegration social tensions and dislocations appear. The Orient is generally dislocated in almost every aspect of her life today, because of these village dislocations.

I think the most pathetic illustration that I saw of the awareness of this dislocation coupled with a sincere effort to try to deal with it constructively came to me when I spent about two hours in Wardha at the training school of Gandhi. There we saw highly trained persons, men and women with doctor's degrees from America, England, and the Continent, spinning about five cents worth of thread a day, picking foreign specks out of their rice by hand, and learning to do other simple processes that would enable them to go back to the villages of India to reestablish the self-sufficient patterns of the past or to slow up their disintegration where the process has not yet been completed. Most Indians frankly said that they did not think the clock could be turned back in this manner, but all with whom I talked stressed the seriousness of India's situation due to the effect of the industrial economy upon her village organization.

The second factor responsible for the changes that are taking place is the penetration into village life of an idea. This I shall illustrate from a contact I had with an Indian gentleman as I crossed the North Sea from England to Denmark in the summer of 1939. We talked of relations between India and England. Finally it became possible for me to ask this gentleman whose business I never learned, what, if anything Christian missions had contributed to India that he thought was worthwhile. Almost without hesitation he said, "Christian Missions have brought to India one idea which will eventually destroy the caste system. It is contributing the idea that any person, no matter what his race, his nationality, his birth, or his occupation, is of infinite worth. This idea the Christian Missionaries are spreading through our villages. It will destroy our caste organization." Since the beginning of Christian Missions and accumulating at an accelerating rate, I repeat, the concept of the individual as the focal point for the constructive forces of a society, and not the village, or the family or the clan, as such, has been gaining ground. Now, since ideas rule, this idea is becoming dominant in the actions of the Orient. Its closely knit family and village patterns are not standing against its force, particularly since it is coupled with the introduction of the new economy. In fact, in many situations, these institutions that have been the goals of Oriental social organization and have exerted a tyranny over the person, are themselves crumbling and a chaotic social situation prevails. A major task of missions, since it is primarily responsible for the growth of individualism, is to help guide the reformation of the institutional pattern of these lands so that they serve as constructive forces helping the individual to achieve his highest personal development. The changes in the structure of the Oriental societies that come from the impact of these forces must be guided to serve the well-being of individuals.

These two forces, then, Euro-American economic technique and Euro-American social conceptions have invaded the strongholds of self-sufficient native economies and social organizations, and have created dissatisfactions, derangements, and demands. These have culminated in upsetting the total rural equilibrium which now expressed itself in the new nationalisms of the Syrians, Indians, Burmese, Chinese, and others. They will shortly express themselves in every other land in similar circumstances.

The reason why the spread of these conditions is almost certain must be understood. In our Western society the building of our culture was based chiefly on new inventions. The adjustment of our social organization to the new mechanical devices of our developing machine-marketing economy, though lagging and often maladjusted, have been made soon enough to prevent extreme maladjustments, for the application of the inventions came relatively slowly.

But in these Oriental situations they do not need to invent completely. All they need to do is to imitate. With the speedy methods of cultural diffusion existing today, imitation is rapid. As a result, not only are the economies disturbed, the social controls in the families, religion, and village are upset. This process will go on increasingly until stabilization of the social order is eventually effected.

What are the implications of these village situations for a Christian rural missions program? I will stress three, among many.

I think the chief implication is that a real program must be developed soon or Christian missions may be by-passed in many of these areas. It is altogether conceivable that the Asiatics may take over these elements of Western culture that they want and omit the others. The process will be through readjusting their own religious conceptions or avoiding religious implications altogether. During this past year a visiting professor of philosophy to Cornell from India has been living in my home. Again and again he has indicated how Hinduism is readjusting itself to the impact of the new circumstances, yet keeping those elements it considers as core to its philosophy.

I had a vivid experience of borrowing from Christian missions without accepting the Christian implications, while I was in Egypt. The first conference I had there was with the director of Egypt's Rural Welfare Centers sponsored by the Ministry of Social Affairs. He is Mohammedan. He outlined a program for establishing 70 welfare centers in advantageous villages up the Nile River. A day or two later we visited two of these. He described a plan of comprehensive village training in agriculture, handicrafts, health, family living. As he told me about this, his emphases sounded strangely familiar. The points he stressed made me wonder where he had been trained. I asked him whether he had attended a rural education institution in the United States. "No," he replied, "I spent two years with Spencer Hatch at Martandam. I got my training, inspiration, and knowledge from him and the rural project he directed there."

Here is an Egyptian Mohammedan transplanting the program of a Christian Rural Y.M.C.A. worker from India to the villagers of his land. If the Egyptians work out these projects, while they may not teach Christianity directly, they will nevertheless stand as monuments to the work of Spencer Hatch, a Christian rural missionary. This more than justifies this rural mission work, but I have wondered again and again, why some Egyptian Christian leader had not gotten this training and inspiration, and made it the focal point for a Christian rural program in Egypt. I saw little Christian rural work there, and I know that there are real opportunities,

especially in connection with the work of Dr. McFeeters at Assiut College.

A second implication, as I see it, is that comprehensive units of operation should be developed where they will have a chance to effect the basic pattern of rural social organization. The reason for this suggestion is that it is possible to develop effective units of work but they may be in places, or with people and conditions where they will not influence, in these changing circumstances, the basic social patterns. The work may be valuable, in itself. But it consumes resources and leadership without much chance to effect the basic pattern before it crystallizes again. Frankly, I was surprised at the extent to which it seemed to me missions were putting personnel and resources into far away places; the tribes people in India, the tribes of far Western China and Tibet, the hill folks in Burma. I know that this opens up new areas. I doubt that the effect on controlling patterns will be significant. I understand too that in some situations, Christian missions are suspect for following this program.

A third implication is that a program of projects for the rural areas include enough trained personnel and resources to serve the whole life of the people in a selected area. The chief reasons for this suggestion are several. As you know even better than I, the life of the rural dweller in the Orient is not separable into segments. He has no economic life separate from his religious life and no religious life separate from his social life. All are intertwined and interwoven. He does not comprehend a program that does not involve all of his life. Therefore a piecemeal approach is likely not to challenge him, except as he may receive some benefit without disturbing his old conceptions and relations. Any program needs, therefore, to emphasize the whole of life: health, vocations, avocations, beauty, knowledge, religion, right social relations.

Such an approach requires trained personnel and adequate resources, I saw a number of rural projects on my visit in the Orient last year. I don't remember one that had adequate personnel to do a comprehensive job nor one that was properly financed. Even the Agricultural College at Allahabad, the key institution in this area, was operating on a shoestring. Professors there who were highly trained to do teaching and research were doing clerical work because finances were not adequate to employ secondary personnel. Therefore, in many places I saw strong talent used in little ways. Frankly, it would be humorous if it were not so tragic to expect "Bill" Hackett in Burma or Neil Alter in Lebanon or Goulter in Chushien, China, to make much impact on their areas with the resources they have. So far as personnel goes they are almost trying to do their jobs alone and spending a lot of time besides to get the money to do it.

A final implication that I stress is that a program of comprehensive Christian projects must include, not only missionary but native leadership. It may seem trite to stress this to you. But in the long run, to mention only one thing, it will be natives, Indians, Chinese, Syrians, who determine how their lands develop. All missionaries can do is to teach, encourage, and serve. The principle that must guide effective long time relations is that of working with people in the solution of their problems. Therefore, if you develop a rural program for these fermenting situations, do not forget to include trained natives in it.